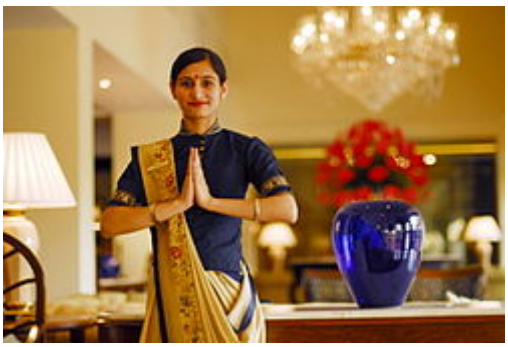
Namaste

Namaste (/ˈnɑːməsteɪ/, Devanagari: नमस्ते, Hindi pronunciation: [nəməsteː] (listen)), sometimes spoken as *Namaskar* and *Namaskaram*, is a customary Hindu greeting.[1] In the contemporary era, it is found on the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and among the Hindu diaspora worldwide. It is used both for greeting and leave-taking.[2][3] *Namaste* is usually spoken with a slight bow and hands pressed together, palms touching and fingers pointing upwards, thumbs close to the chest. This gesture is called *Añjali Mudrā* or *Pranamasana*.[4]

In Hinduism, it means "I bow to the divine in you".[5][6][1] Namaste may also be spoken without the gesture or the namaste gesture performed wordlessly



Pressing hands together with a smile to greet Namaste – a common cultural practice in India.

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Etymology, meaning and origins

Left: Hindu god Kubera on the left with a person in Namaste pose (13th century, Chennakesava Temple, Somanathapura, Karnataka, India). Namaste or Añjali Mudrā are common in historic Hindu temple reliefs. **Right**: Entrance pillar relief (Thrichittatt Maha Vishnu Temple, Kerala, India).

Namaste (*Namah* + *te*, Devanagari: नमः+ ते = नमस्ते) is derived from Sanskrit and is a combination of the word *namah* and the second person dative pronoun in its enclitic form, *te*.[7] The word *namaḥ* takes the sandhi form *namas* before the sound *te*.[8][9]

The term *namas* is found in the Vedic literature. *Namas-krita* and related terms appear in the Hindu scripture *Rigveda* such as in the *Vivaha Sukta*, verse 10.85.22[10] in the sense of "worship, adore", while *Namaskara* appears in the sense of "exclamatory adoration, homage, salutation and worship" in the *Atharvaveda*, the *Taittiriya Samhita*, and the *Aitareya Brahmana*. It is an expression of

veneration, worship, reverence, an "offering of homage" and "adoration" in the Vedic literature and post-Vedic texts such as the *Mahabharata*.[11][12] The phrase *Namas-te* appears with this meaning in *Rigveda* 8.75.10,[13] *Atharvaveda* verse 6.13.2, *Taittirya Samhita* 2.6.11.2 and in numerous other instances in many early Hindu texts.[14] It is also found in numerous ancient and medieval era sculpture and *mandapa* relief artwork in Hindu temples.[15]

According to the Indologist Stephen Phillips, the terms "*te* and *tvam*" are an informal, familiar form of "you" in Sanskrit (much like thou and thee in archaic English), and it is typically not used for unfamiliar adults. It is reserved for someone familiar, intimate, divine or a child.[16][17] By using the dative form of *tvam* in the greeting *Namas-te*, there is an embedded secondary, metaphorical sense in the word. This is the basis of the pragmatic meaning of *Namas-te*, that is "salutations to the (divine) child (in your heart)", states Phillips.[16]

Aishwarya Rai making a Namaste gesture.

In the contemporary era, *Namaḥ* means 'bow', 'obeisance', 'reverential salutation' or 'adoration'[18] and *te* means 'to you' (singular dative case of 'tvam'). Therefore, Namaste literally means "bowing to you".[19] In Hinduism, it also has a spiritual import reflecting the belief that "the divine and self (atman, soul) is same in you and me", and connotes "I bow to the divine in you".[5][1][20] According to sociologist Holly Oxhandler, it is a Hindu term which means, “the sacred in me recognizes the sacred in you”.[21]

A less common variant is used in the case of three or more people being addressed namely *Namo vaḥ* which is a combination of *namaḥ* and the enclitic 2nd person plural pronoun *vaḥ*.[7] The word *namaḥ* takes the Sandhi form *namo* before the sound *v*.[8] An even less common variant is used in the case of two people being addressed, namely, *Namo vām*, which is a combination of *namaḥ* and the enclitic 2nd person dual pronoun *vām*.[7]

Representations

Excavations for Indus Valley Civilization have revealed many male and female terracotta figures in *Namaste* posture.[22][23] These archaeological findings are dated to be between 3000 BC to 2000 BC.[24][25]

Uses

The gesture is widely used throughout the Indian subcontinent, parts of Asia and beyond where people of South and Southeast Asian origins have migrated.[5] Namaste or namaskar is used as a respectful form of greeting, acknowledging and welcoming a relative, guest or stranger.[3] In some contexts, Namaste is used by one person to express gratitude for assistance offered or given, and to thank the other person for his or her generous kindness.[26]

Namaskar is also part of the 16 upacharas used inside temples or any place of formal Puja (worship). *Namaste* in the context of deity worship, scholars conclude,[27][28] has the same function as in greeting a guest or anyone else. It expresses politeness, courtesy, honor, and hospitality from one person to the other. It is used in goodbyes as well. This is sometimes expressed, in ancient Hindu scriptures such as Taittiriya Upanishad, as Atithi Devo Bhava (literally, treat the guest like a god).[29][30]

Namaste is one of the six forms of pranama, and in parts of India these terms are used synonymously.[31][32]

A side view of a Hindu man in Namaste pose.

The ninth line from top, last word in the *Rigveda* manuscript above is *namas* in the sense of "reverential worship".

Statue with Namaste pose in a Thai temple.

Regional variations

In the Hindi and Nepali speaking populations of the Indian subcontinent, Namaste (Hindi: [nəməsteː] (listen), Devanagari: नमस्ते) and Namaskār are used synonymously. In Nepal, people generally use Namaskāra for greeting and respecting their elders. In Odia Namaste is also known as ନମସ୍କାର (namaskār) General greeting. In Kannada, Sharanu (ಶರಣು) is used in Northern Karnataka and Namaskāra (ನಮಸ್ಕಾರ) for singular and Namaskaragalu (ನಮಸ್ಕಾರಗಳು) is widely used in the rest of Karnataka for Namaste. In Telugu, Namaste is also known as Dandamu (దండము) or namaskaram (నమస్కారం) for singular and Dandaalu or namaskaralu for plural form. Pranamamu (ప్రణామము) is also used in formal Telugu. In Bengali, the Namaste gesture is expressed as Nōmōshkar (নমস্কার), and as Prōnäm (Bengali: প্রণাম) informally. In Assamese, Nômôskar (নমস্কাৰ) is used. In Marathi, Namaskār (नमस्कार) is used. In Tamil, Namaste is known as *Vanakkam* (வணக்கம்) which is derived from the root word *vanangu* (வணங்கு) meaning *to bow* or *to greet*. In Malayalam, Namaskāram (നമസ്കാരം) is used. The Sinhalese word *namaskāra* (නමස්කාර) which derived from Pali also has the same meaning as namaskār/namaskāra in Hindi, Nepali, Odia and Kannada languages, or a different greeting word is *āyubōvan* (ආයුබෝවන්) which has the meaning*wishing long life*.

See also

- Culture of India
- Culture of Nepal
- Añjali Mudrā

- Pranāma
- Sat Sri Akal
- Gassho
- Sampeah
- Wai

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    नमस्ते अग्न ओजसे गृणन्ति देव कृष्टयः ।
    Translation: "**Homage to** your power, Agni! The separate peoples hymn you, o god."
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